

R 241544Z OCT 08  
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9274  
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
AMCONSUL CASABLANCA  
AMCONSUL DUBAI  
AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
AMCONSUL JEDDAH  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
AMEMBASSY SANAA  
AMEMBASSY DOHA  
AMEMBASSY MANAMA  
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT  
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA  
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR  
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
AMEMBASSY DAKAR

UNCLAS RABAT 001024

STATE FOR R, NEA/PPD, NEA/MAG, IIP/G/NEA/SA, ECA/PE/V, ECA/PE/C AND  
PA/OBS/BS&P (SANTULLI)  
LONDON FOR MOC  
DUBAI FOR MEDIA HUB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SCUL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [KIRC](#) [PHUM](#) [KMPI](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: "ISLAM IN AMERICA" DOCUMENTARY ON MOROCCAN TV

-----  
Summary and Comment  
-----

¶1. Morocco's semi-private television network "2m" produced a 28-minute documentary on Islam in the U.S., which aired in early October on the popular monthly news magazine "Grand Angle" ("Wide Angle"). It also aired on Al Maghribiya satellite channel, which is widely watched by the Moroccan community abroad, particularly in Europe. An estimated 3.5 million viewers saw the first airing; an unknown - but probably larger - number saw the satellite network broadcast. The feature, entitled "Islam in the United States: Another War?" presented a hard-hitting but balanced look at American attitudes towards Islam, as well as Muslim-American views on life in the U.S. Through interviews and footage of a wide range of Americans - Muslim rights activists, a radical anti-Islamic reverend, Muslim politicians and comedians, and ordinary citizens - "2m" presented a complex portrait of Islam in America, while underscoring that the values of religious freedom and tolerance predominate. "2m"'s decision to present a few extremist voices increased the program's credibility and thus strengthened the reporter's ultimate conclusion that Muslim-Americans are free to practice their faith peacefully. This project was funded out of post's FY08 PD supplemental allotment in cooperation with the State Department's TV cooperative program. End summary and comment.

-----  
Media and Public Opinion on Islam  
-----

¶2. "Seven years after the attacks of 9/11, America is still the land of opportunity, [with] the freedom to practice one's personal faith," opined reporter Salma Mhaoud in her opening voice-over. She also noted, however, that Islam represented a special case worthy of attention, as it divides Americans, be they men (or women) on the street, politicians or journalists.

¶3. Mhaoud opened by citing the results of recent polls conducted by the Pew Research Institute indicating that 35% of Americans had a negative view of Islam in 2007, as opposed to 22% in 2002. 45% of Americans thought that Islam encouraged violence more than other religions. Providing context for these figures, Mhaoud interviewed students of communications at American University, who told her that the media played a critical role in fostering the image that Americans have of Islam. Many Americans, the students argued, understood that this image did not necessarily reflect reality.

¶4. Mhaoud observed that some radical voices in the media, such as radio talk-show host Bill Handle, had been accused of encouraging Islamophobia by the Council for American Islamic Relations (CAIR). His sarcastic comments following a deadly stampede during a Hajj pilgrimage several years ago triggered an uproar among Muslim-Americans. In an interview with "2m," Handle justified his comments by saying that he did not make any distinction between Jews, Christians and Muslims, that all were objects of his sarcasm and humor.

-----  
Islam and American Politics  
-----

¶5. The reporter discussed the case of Reverend Rod Parsley, using stock footage of him making anti-Islamic comments, and how his friendship with Republican presidential candidate John McCain could have stained the latter's reputation had McCain not publicly disavowed relations with Parsley's church. She observed in this regard that Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama has long been suspected of being a secret Muslim. She noted that he had been described as the favorite candidate of Hamas by his opponent, and reported on the controversy surrounding The New Yorker magazine cover portraying Obama as a radical Muslim. She noted that many Americans viewed this cartoon as exaggerated and politically motivated, and not a representation of reality.

¶6. Mhaoud interviewed Minnesota Congressman Keith Ellison (a Muslim), who explained that ignorance was among the reasons Americans associated Islam with violence. According to him, the media's influence is all the more dangerous when it operates in an environment of ignorance, adding, "it is not true that America hates Islam." Imam Abdul Alim Moussa preaches an opposing point of view; in a speech "2m" picked up from YouTube, the controversial imam claimed that the U.S. is in war against Islam. Leonard Steinhorn, an expert in communications, expressed the view to "2m" that Muslims themselves had to take responsibility for managing Islam's image problem in the U.S.

-----  
Integration and Muslim-American Public Opinion  
-----

¶7. Mhaoud turned to questions about Muslim-American attitudes, citing polls indicating that 15% are in favor of terrorist attacks, while 72% are happy with their life in the United States. She interviewed a Muslim restaurant owner and a businessman, who told her that Muslims did not experience discrimination in the U.S, except occasionally at airports.

¶8. Since 9/11, and especially after an imam was convicted for having being in contact with the hijackers of the airplane that hit the Pentagon, mosques have faced greater monitoring than previously, "2m" reported. Mhaoud interviewed Muslim-Americans who reported that preachers are more moderate in tone since 9/11, but the substance of their messages had not changed dramatically.

-----  
Everyday Islam  
-----

¶9. "2m" concluded its documentary by interviewing Bryant Moss, a Muslim-American who founded the comedy group "Allah made me funny." He asserted that American Islam was no different from Islam in other parts of the world. Taking the reporter on a tour of his neighborhood, he asked the audience to see his home and his

community as representative of every day Islam in America: "This is the real Islam, it is natural, it is not what you see on television." Mhaoud concluded her feature by observing that, despite all the controversy surrounding Islam in the United States, Moss practiced his religion peacefully, which - she said - is what was great about "this country of the free, home of the brave."

-----  
Background on Project  
-----

10. This project was funded by the State Department through the FY08 PD supplemental and managed by the Foreign Press Center's TV Coop program. The Moroccan crew - a journalist, cameraman and sound engineer - conducted filming in July 2008, working with a producer contracted by the State Department. They visited Washington, DC, New York and Los Angeles over the course of two weeks. 2m broadcast the feature story during prime-time on September 25 as part of its award-winning monthly news magazine program "Grand Angle" ("Wide Angle"). "Grand Angle" has a 14.2% market share, which translates into about 3.5 million viewers. The same program was aired on Al Maghribiya satellite channel, which is widely watched by the Moroccan community abroad, particularly in Europe. 2m has no mechanism for measuring overseas viewership, but believes it is larger than the domestic audience.

JACKSON